

Reflection

An important part of ministry, even all of life, is thinking critically about what is happening. We might call this evaluation, or meditation, or something else. I am calling it reflection. The neglect of careful thought and evaluation of one's circumstances, colleagues, activities, etc. leads to poor planning, poor execution, and poor results, which brings about discouragement, relational conflict, dwindling support, and deterioration of the ministry.

Reflection is not an activity that can be left to those who like to do it, or who are good at it. The negative consequences of neglecting to reflect are so significant that no one can afford to pass this off as an optional activity. But it is clear that some people find reflection easy and enjoyable and others find it difficult and unpleasant. This is no surprise. All of us have strengths and weaknesses and no one is competent at everything. This is why God gives us each other. The strengths of one supplement the weaknesses of another, and we improve by working with those who are strong where we are weak.

Here are some suggestions for those who find reflection difficult and unpleasant.

- 1) **Schedule.** Build reflection time into your schedule. If this is not something that you do instinctively and regularly, the first step is to set aside regular times for reflection. Some of us are project people, who work best by diving into a project for an extended period of time. It takes us a while to get all our faculties engaged in the task, and then we are productive for hours. Others of us are task people. We can quickly check off individual tasks, but cannot maintain sustained interest in a project for a long period of time. If you are a project person, you might schedule reflection for a half day each month and perhaps a couple of days once a year. If you are a task person, you will likely do better scheduling an hour each week. Neither approach is better or worse. Take whatever approach best suits your work-style. The important thing is to reserve that time and refuse to let other demands encroach on it.
- 2) **Pray.** God is your best helper. Use Him! Ask for insight about your situation, wisdom about possible courses of action, knowledge of what action to take; for courage, decisiveness, perseverance, etc.
- 3) **Write.** Writing helps you think now, helps you remember, and helps you think in the future. Write down significant features of your situation, issues you are facing, questions you have, possible solutions and courses of action. As you go, it will probably be helpful to organize your thoughts into categories. Some examples might be self improvement, preaching, evangelism, personal organization, counseling, etc. Find a convenient place to store your thoughts such as a word processor document or a Google document. Many people will find a note app like Evernote to be the easiest way to record and refer to their reflections.
- 4) **Read.** The scripture, of course! The best insight will come from God, and scripture will deepen and broaden your understanding of yourself, others, and everything. Other literature can help, too, but be judicious! Do not blindly read the hot item that everyone is talking about. Read only what will help you, but that is not limited to material on reflection, or ministry. Read about social trends, political issues, sports news, et. Magazines, websites, podcasts, etc. can be helpful, but beware of spending so much time reading that you never reflect! Novels, history, travelogues, biographies, and much else might help you reflect on your own situation. You have a lifetime ahead of you. Read as much as is helpful to you, whether that is an article per week or a book per year. But do not overdo the reading. It is far more beneficial to talk to millennials than to read articles about them.

- 5) **Consult.** Ask others for suggestions and advice. Other campus ministers are an obvious place to turn. Perhaps less obvious, but just as valuable, are your students. If you are struggling with reflection, you likely know some campus minister for whom this is a strength and can stimulate your thinking. The RUF Listserv is also a great resource. In a ministry of any size there will be students who are gifted in this. They will be immature in many areas, but in this area they can be a big help, and they are readily available. A local pastor or businessman might give you great insight. And of course your wife and supervisor should be very helpful.
- 6) **Collaborate.** Include others in the process. In addition to asking for help, some of the people mentioned above might be able to join you in your scheduled reflection times. This requires an investment of time and the ability to put themselves in your shoes, so this is not something most people can do or should attempt – but is worth considering. When you have a reasonably mature Ministry Team you should write your quarterly campus reports as a group. This is an example of collaborative reflection.

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